

FEBRUARY 11, 1982

The biggest cattle event in the Shortgrass Country for the year was the special cow sale in San Angelo a couple of weeks ago. Over 2000 head of bred cows and pairs were sold along with the regular run for that day. Standing room at ringside was tight and the crowd seemed determined to hold their seats until the last lots were sold. Several bunches of black humpies and the other crested crosses of the English breeds crowded the \$700 a pair range. A few passed that mark, but the mid-sixes seemed to be the stopping point.

I spent most of the sale standing in the foyer out front. I was hoping that perhaps the advertising prior to the sale and the ensuing action inside might draw a newcomer who could be detoured to look at our cattle out at the ranch. Preferably a favorite grandson or a spoiled nephew that had seen the Highland Black Angus of Scotland while he was studying abroad and decided he'd like a herd of blacks for his stateside ranch.

I'll admit there wasn't much chance of that happening. However, from the way the buyers were ignoring the straight bred cattle, and the discounts and the discrimination levied against them, I was as well off out front as I was inside. Sales tactics were hard to concentrate on so close to a staff of professionals. I wasn't resentful of the trend to humpy cattle as much as I longed for a breakthrough in veterinary medicine that'd discover a hump transplant which would make an Angus cow's ears grow longer and her dewlap flop between her knees.

Four miles from that fateful sale, I knew there was a cow doctor that for a mere 250 bucks could perform the miracle of embryo transplanting. Up at Dallas, surgeons routinely smooth age from the faces of rich ladies. Down in Argentina, I'd read, there was a doctor that fitted animal dentures. So why couldn't the Dallas doctors and the egg gathering vets and the false-teeth men collaborate in transplanting a hump on a black cow's neck? Cattle are sold on their looks. You know that without me telling you so. Line backs are culled and pintos are turned back to the pen. We don't think of the skillet or the oven. We are as fickle as a woman in a hat shop trying to keep the veils in tone with her new hair style.

Of course I wasn't going to offer to skin my old cows to prove my point on a rail. The very reason I was willing to stand in the cold was to avoid that trap. It was a lonely stance, and fruitless to the end. One of my compadres questioned my purpose. I told him I was going to make a comeback. He wished me luck, but said he was afraid my timing was bad.

The average of the cows was said to be up \$50 a pair from December. San Angelo must not be drawing the idle rich. I wish they'd add some new billboards on the highway going to the ranch. Just any change would shorten the drive.